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Working Together to Improve Student Attendance
A Message from the Minister

In their 2012 report on chronic absenteeism *The Importance of Being in School,* Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes state that regular attendance is a key factor in keeping student learning on track. They found that students who have attendance rates of 97 to 100 percent have a better chance of performing well academically.

This is particularly true for students in the Early Years, when patterns of behaviour, routines, and early learning set the foundation for school success. Balfanz and Byrnes's findings confirm that students with high rates of attendance in the Early Years have greater success in the Middle Years and are more likely to graduate. When there is chronic absenteeism, which is defined as attendance of 90 percent or less, the student starts to fall behind his or her peers in Middle Years, and is at risk of disengagement and not receiving sufficient credits to graduate.

The reasons students are absent from school are multi-faceted and may be difficult to address. There is no simple "one size fits all" solution that will work in every community. The shared challenge is to engage all students in the learning process, and for each school community to address barriers to attendance, learning, and school completion.

Manitoba Education has initiated a coordinated effort with schools, parents, educational partners, and community agencies to work together to address the causes of non-attendance, and to encourage an environment where every child can attend school every day. Monthly school attendance rates are being analyzed, and ways to address challenging attendance rates in particular schools are being explored. Improved processes and expectations are in place for transferring students' files when they change schools. Local policies related to attendance in high schools are being examined to ensure they support student engagement and align with expectations around the new legislation that requires students to stay in school until the age of 18.

In addition, Manitoba Education is currently funding 15 school divisions in the second year of implementation of locally developed attendance projects that are sensitive to school, culture, and community needs. Many of these projects focus on building relationships between the students' families and the school, and providing incentives for students to improve attendance. They include a walking school bus program that assists children in getting to school safely and on time, increased opportunities for students to benefit from academic support and alternative settings, and parental/community awareness campaigns.

Members of each of these project teams collected data and presented what they have learned from their projects at an Attendance Fair in March 2013. At this event, the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils (MAPC) and Manitoba Education launched a province-wide communications strategy to increase parental/caregiver and community awareness about the importance of regular daily attendance. The slogan for this new strategy, "Everybody in School Every Day," will be seen throughout the province on banners, posters, community and closed-circuit television, electronic message boards, and printed information. Brochures are available on the Manitoba Education website in 15 languages at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/attendance>.

Through strong partnerships with families, schools, and communities, barriers to attendance can be overcome and the goal of "Everybody in School Every Day" can be achieved.

Nancy Allan
Minister of Education

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Tomorrow Now, Manitoba's Green Plan

By Carolee Buckler

In June 2012, the Manitoba government released *Tomorrow Now*, which is its "eight-year strategic plan for protecting the environment while ensuring a prosperous and environmentally conscious economy."

This green plan sets out actions for the following five key priorities:

1. Good for our economy – good for our environment
2. Changing our ways for a changing climate
3. Safeguarding our water, air, and land
4. Nurturing our living world
5. Simple individual choices – big results

Within the fifth priority "Simple individual choices – big results," the province emphasizes that all Manitobans have a role to play in ensuring that the benefits of our environment are preserved for both present and future generations. It also emphasizes the need for Manitobans to work together, lead by example, and create sustainable policies that encourage environmentally positive behaviour throughout society and the economy.

Tomorrow Now advances learning, education, civic leadership, and awareness—all of which are crucial to achieving this priority. Actions to support this change include mobilizing people and encouraging eco-learning, which includes promoting sustainable schools and education for sustainable development (ESD).

Since the release of the *Tomorrow Now* document, Manitoba Education has made progress in achieving the following actions:

- An Education for Sustainability Leadership Council has been established. Made up of educational leaders and stakeholders from post-secondary institutions, school boards and trustees associations, administrators, teachers' societies, parent councils, other government departments, and Manitoba Education, this council will advise on the development of a new three-year action plan on sustainability for formal education. The committee has met several times and will be releasing a document in the spring of 2013.
- The school plan template and web survey are being revised to include questions related to ESD and will be rolled out in the fall of 2013. This data will enable Manitoba Education to determine the extent to which the goal of every school having a sustainability school plan by 2015 has been reached. Professional development opportunities are being provided to schools on sustainable school planning.

- In the winter of 2012, Manitoba Education released the resource *Making a Living, Sustainably: Green Jobs and Sustainability Careers*, which can be found at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/pdfs/green_jobs.pdf>. This resource was produced to help youth in Manitoba explore sustainability career options and practices, and to prepare to live and work for a more sustainable future.
- The ESD Faculties of Education Committee released the report *Suggested Actions for Reorienting Teacher Education in Faculties of Education in Manitoba to Address Sustainability*. The faculties are in the process of reviewing the document and developing responses based on the recommendations found in the report.
- The new Grade 12 Social Studies course *Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability* will be in full implementation in the fall of 2013.
- Four new schools have been built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certification, and one school has targeted gold certification in the province. In addition, funding has been provided to new schools for greening their school grounds and creating outdoor learning environments.
- Manitoba Education continues its partnership with FortWhyte Alive (FWA) to increase student and educator awareness, understanding, and actions related to living sustainably in an urban setting. This partnership is providing professional development opportunities for teachers on how they can take their classrooms outdoors, and how they can incorporate into their curriculum the importance of maintaining thriving ecosystems, reducing pollution, and protecting habitats.

To learn more about *Tomorrow Now—Manitoba's Green Plan*, visit <www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/tomorrownowgreenplan/index.html>.

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Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI)—2012 Annual Fall Gathering

By Aboriginal Education Directorate Staff

The 2012 Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI) annual fall gathering took place October 30th at the Ramada Viscount Gort in Winnipeg. A broad, diverse group of professionals attended the gathering, including school representatives involved in implementing the CSPI, educators, community leaders, researchers, and the Premier of Manitoba.

A big part of the CSPI gathering was the Gallery Walk, where each school prepared a display of a CSPI project they completed. This allowed people from other schools the opportunity to share and learn about the projects, and to network with each other. The morning started off with the community schools setting up their displays. As the delegates came in, there was a sense of connection and community. The community schools were very happy to be there and see each other.

Afterwards, the Community Schools Quilt was unveiled. Each community school was asked to create a unique quilt square, themed around their school and its community. All the quilt squares were assembled into one large quilt representing the CSPI community in Manitoba in all its variety.

Premier Greg Selinger began the afternoon session, speaking about his considerable experience and involvement in community planning, development, and empowerment. The Premier spoke on how the CSPI is a shining example of communities working together to make a difference in the lives of students, parents, and educators, and creating positive educational outcomes.

Two keynote speakers highlighted the afternoon agenda, beginning with Sharon Redsky, a resident of Winnipeg and a First Nation member of Shoal Lake #40, and manager of the University of Winnipeg's Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre. This was followed by Wab Kinew, a popular Aboriginal broadcaster who is a member of Midewin (Grand Medicine Society) and has just been recently appointed the University of Winnipeg's first Director of Indigenous Inclusion. In his new position, Wab Kinew will gather expertise on developing, recruiting, and retaining Indigenous talent, as well as strategies for working with Indigenous communities. An explicit focus will be placed on nurturing Aboriginal entrepreneurship and business training.

Sharon Redsky spoke about how Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre is a community partnership initiative that is intended to be a bridge and connection between the University of Winnipeg's varied programs and educational opportunities and the Aboriginal and inner-city communities. Chiiwaakanak is designed as an educational gathering place that is inclusive and accessible for all. Its successes include increased Aboriginal enrolment at the University of Winnipeg and an increase in the number of low income students who are gaining access to educational programming. Aboriginal student applications jumped 24 percent at the University of Winnipeg between September 2010 and September 2011.

Each square of the Community Schools Quilt represents a member of the CSPI community.

The Community Schools Partnership Initiative (CSPI) was launched in January 2005 with the goals of supporting schools in low socio-economic status communities, and enhancing education outcomes by developing and strengthening partnerships among the education system, service delivery agencies, parents, and community. As of 2012, there are 29 community schools, with 18 in Winnipeg and 11 in rural, northern, and urban locations.

Wab Kinew spoke about his time hosting the acclaimed CBC series 8th Fire, about working with Canadians who are bringing communities together, and about building a new generation of active, empowered citizens. A critical message that Wab emphasized was that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens can have a mutually trusting and beneficial relationship.

To learn about the CSPI, visit our webpage at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/cspi/index.html>.

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Connecting Educators to Learning Resources

By Manitoba Education Library Staff

The Manitoba Education Library, which is located on the main floor of the Robert Fletcher Building at 1181 Portage Avenue, provides learning resources and materials to support Manitoba curricula and professional learning for educators.

The newest library service is journal eRouting, which allows patrons to sign up and receive email notifications when new issues of journals become available. This is done through the library's electronic databases, which give access to an extensive selection of educational articles on a 24/7 basis.

In addition to full text journals, the library can connect patrons to online encyclopedias and eBooks. Convenient, easy-to-use eBooks can be "checked out" and downloaded through the Manitoba Education Library website anytime, anywhere.

Requests for materials can also be made in person, over the phone, via email, or through the online forms. Mail or courier service is available to send the items directly to the workplace.

When visiting the library in person, patrons can take advantage of the study space, computers, photocopier, and free wireless. Patrons can also bring their children and have them spend time in the Kid Zone while looking for resources. Group meeting rooms are also available to book in advance. If patrons can't visit during the week, the library is open most Saturdays and almost all holiday weekends during the school year. Check out the hours on our website at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/iru/index.html>.

Educators can stay connected by signing up to receive updates about new resources and services. Subscribe at Manitoba Education's K–12 website at <http://web16.gov.mb.ca/ss/user/controller?action=subscribe>.

For more information, contact
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Changes in Canadian Copyright Law Benefit Educators

By Marjorie Poor

Recent changes to Canada's copyright law provide many new benefits to educators and students. In the summer of 2012, two significant events set new rules for using copyright-protected works for educational purposes: in June, Parliament passed new federal copyright legislation; and in July, there was a landmark Supreme Court decision.

The new *Copyright Act* modernized Canada's copyright law to address Canadians' learning needs in an evolving digital age. Key clarifications and changes of interest to educators include the following:

- The amendment on the educational use of the Internet allows teachers and students to use materials that are publicly available on the Internet for their learning and educational pursuits.
- News or news commentary programs may be recorded for later viewing by students without paying royalties.
- Audiovisual works (movies and television programs) may be screened or played in the classroom.
- Digital displays, such as interactive whiteboards and digital projectors, may be used in classrooms, subject to the commercial availability rule.
- Lessons may be recorded to be made available for viewing by students at a later time.
- School libraries may use digital technology to deliver an interlibrary loan copy of a copyright-protected work.
- "Education" has been added as an allowable purpose within the *Copyright Act's* fair dealing provision. Fair dealing permits the use of copyrighted material without permission or payment of royalties as long as the material is used for an allowable purpose and is considered "fair" according to six factors set out in a Supreme Court decision in 2004: the purpose, character, and amount of the dealing; alternatives to the dealing; the nature of the work; and the effect of the dealing on the market for the work.

The Supreme Court of Canada established how fair dealing should be applied in schools with the 2012 *Alberta (Education)* v. *Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright)* decision. This ruling clarified that teachers may make copies of short excerpts of a copyright-protected work for students in their classes without having to ask for copyright permission or to pay copyright royalties.

The addition of "education" to the fair dealing provision together with the Supreme Court's 2012 decision mean that many educational uses of copyright-protected works no longer require payment of copyright royalties. As a result, beginning in January 2013, public schools within Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) jurisdictions are no longer operating under the previous Access Copyright School Tariff, but instead are following *Fair Dealing Guidelines*, which were established to help educators deal fairly with copyright-protected works under the new laws. The *Fair Dealing Guidelines* define "short excerpts" and prescribe safe limits for copying copyright-protected material in ways that would almost certainly be fair.

The *Fair Dealing Guidelines* and a newly revised edition of *Copyright Matters!*, a user-friendly guide to copyright law in education, have been distributed to schools in Manitoba and are available online at the CMEC website at <www.cmec.ca>.

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Towards Interfaces for Equity in Education

By Marlene Atleo

Nine years ago, I received an email that said the University of Manitoba was looking for faculty in the area of adult and higher education. I was interested, and so I investigated the position, the faculty, province, and Aboriginal community in which I was considering making my home so far away from my grandchildren.

Although the highway can be dark, damp, and dreary, especially in winter, I felt a look-see couldn't hurt. The February interview was on a cold, windy day. In Manitoba, Aboriginal issues are amplified by a history, geography, climate, and socio-political reality that are daunting. Manitoba seemed to be at the cusp of an educational movement, and I felt it was an environment in which my experience and education could support emergent social change through education. And as a bonus, the people were friendly!

According to the Elders, it is a cornerstone of Indigenous learning to participate in changing socio-economic environments. Knowing one's socio-cultural pathway over time and space is about understanding one's cultural orientation. My research interest has been about developing sound foundations and infrastructure for educational preparation, recruitment, retention, completion, career establishment, career advancement, career change, and institutional succession, not only as part of individuals' lifelong learning, but also as intergenerational knowledge transmission.

From this vantage point, learning is a function of an integrated identity that can adapt to environmental change.

The following four interrelated aspects of my work are particularly important:

1. supporting teacher candidates in understanding education over the lifespan across cultures
2. mentoring graduate students in their self-expression and research projects across disciplines
3. supporting faculty, community, provincial, and national initiatives in adult education, technologically supported learning, cross-cultural competency, and infrastructure development
4. conducting research into the role of Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous language, and Indigenous storywork in the development of successful Aboriginal educators.

In particular, I have looked at the interface between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems, how Aboriginal people participate in educational institutional development, how non-Aboriginal allies participate with Aboriginal educators, and how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators decolonize themselves with a view to developing institutional equities in education.

My time in Manitoba has been personally and professionally gratifying. It is my greatest joy to be able to work with graduate students who pour themselves into their work, struggling with themselves and their own search for integrity. I have had the opportunity to participate with organizations that do the "good work" in communities of teachers and learners, and with networks and committees in planning and promoting new ideas and ways of being and doing. As we move from the mechanically bound educational vision of yesterday to a more quantum-based, sustainable, 21st-century vision, Treaty peoples are in reciprocity with one another in "Manito-Abe." Indeed, this is a place where the Creator sits. The story, the knowledge, and the languages are all still here and in place.

There is much yet to be done for a new sustainable vision of education to include equitable participation of Aboriginal people and learning over the lifespan. Understanding our own histories as educators is foundational to our continuing personal and professional development over our lifespan. As we engage with change in our lives, our workplace, and our families, we work to attune our critical personal narrative that is the basis for teaching and mentoring. Non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people alike can share privilege and deconstruct racism together, starting with their own praxis in the educational system.

Profile **Marlene Atleo**

Marlene Atleo, ?eh ?eh naa tuu kwiss, is an L2 English and L1 German speaker and a member of the Ahousaht First Nation in British Columbia. After a career in the West Coast salmon fishing industry, Marlene completed a Home Economics degree, and then completed her Master's degree in Family Science-Family Resource Management. Atleo was a director of Umeek HRD Inc., and executive director of the Ahousaht Holistic Society. Her work with First Nations Elders with regard to the Nuu-chah-nulth "Provider" Umeek resulted in her dissertation receiving the Thomas Greenfield Award from the Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration.

As an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba, Dr. Atleo currently teaches Aboriginal and cross-cultural education in the Bachelor of Education program and adult and post-secondary education in the Master of Education and Ph.D. programs.

Identifying Barriers to Student Attendance at RETSD

By Connie Boutet, Manager of Student Services, and
Joan Trubyk, Assistant Superintendent-Student Services
River East Transcona School Division

During the 2011/2012 school year, River East Transcona School Division (RETSD) conducted a needs assessment that was designed to identify the specific barriers to school attendance in the RETSD community, and to provide recommendations for interventions that will improve student attendance. This assessment explored the following questions:

- Why are students missing school in RETSD?
- How concerned are school staff and parents about student absence from school?
- What interventions are likely to be most effective in improving student attendance in our division?

Divisional data from 2010/2011 was compiled to identify the population of Kindergarten to Grade 6 students who had an absence rate of between 10% and 20% in the previous school year. A random sample of 25 students representing 18 schools was selected from this list for participation in a project intended to develop proactive interventions before attendance problems become chronic and intractable. An attendance facilitator was hired to gather additional information through review of pupil files and interviews with school personnel and with the students' parents or legal guardians.

Data collection focused on four areas: reasons reported for student absence by school personnel and parent/guardian; level of concern expressed by school staff and parent/guardian; interventions attempted at school and at home; and a comparison of school and home perspectives.

School staff cited home-based factors as the most frequently reported reason for absences. These factors include parents/guardians who work nights or shift work, have medical issues of their own, have several young children in the home, are parenting alone and are overwhelmed, or have other family stressors that are believed to contribute to their difficulty with getting their children to school on a regular basis.

The reasons most frequently given by parents/guardians for keeping their child at home also fell under the home-based factors category. Several parents reported significant demands and stress in their lives, with minimal support, making it difficult to ensure their child gets to school every day. Many parents also indicated that they allow their child to stay home due to cold symptoms, headaches, asthma, etc.

Most schools and parents were not concerned or only slightly concerned about the students' absences. If students missed a couple of non-consecutive days per month, and were doing well academically and socially, their absences often went undetected by school personnel. Some parents felt it was appropriate to keep their children out of school on special occasions such as birthdays, family trips, and sporting events, and many stated they keep their child home during cold weather.

The majority of schools and parents reported few or no interventions to address student absences for the 10–20% absence population. The intervention most frequently used by school personnel was a call home from the principal or classroom teacher.

The data from the needs assessment resulted in several ideas for improving student attendance in the RETSD community. For the second year of the project, one school was selected to pilot these ideas and recommendations. The attendance facilitator will assist the school with the following tasks:

- Early identification and follow-up of students with poor attendance
- Connecting students and families with divisional and community supports
- Classroom and parent presentations on the importance of regular school attendance
- School-wide interventions to improve student attendance

Students who are identified as struggling with their attendance will be interviewed by the attendance facilitator to gain insight and to engage them in problem solving around this issue. With this intensive focus on student attendance at one school, we hope to gain additional information and experience that can be shared across the RETSD to improve attendance for all students.

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The newsletter includes articles from the education community and from Manitoba Education. Signed articles appearing in this magazine express the views of their authors and not necessarily those of the Department.

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We invite contributions to *Education Manitoba*. When forwarding submissions, please include your name and telephone number, and send materials in print and electronic formats to:

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We also want to hear what you think about our newsletter. Please send your comments, ideas, and suggestions to the address specified above.

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